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AUTHOR Aronson, David W.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To investigate sexual aggressiveness in college-age males, a sexual experiences questionnaire was used for preselection of university males high, moderate and low in sexual aggressiveness. High and moderate males were individually interviewed by a trained male graduate psychology student, and all three groups were administered a variety of attitudinal, communication and adjustment inventories. Between-group comparisons suggested a sociopathic-like conceptualization of the high sexually agressive male. Results were discussed in terms of two theoretical formulations of rape (individual psychopathology vs. social control models), and applications to clinical psychology were drawn. (Author)

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A Study of Sexual Aggression Among University Males

David W. Aronson, Ronald J. Olah and Mary P. Koss

Kent State University

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Abstract

Using a sexual experiences questionnaire for preselection, university males high, moderate and low in sexual aggressiveness were sampled from a larger population of subjects. High and moderate males were individually interviewed by a trained male graduate psychology student, and all three groups were administered a variety of attitudinal, communication and adjustment inventories. Between group comparisons suggested a "sociopathic-like" conceptualization of the high sexually aggressive male. These results were discussed in terms of two theoretical formulations of rape (individual psychopathology vs. social control models), and applications to clinical psychology were drawn.

Historically (Albin, 1977), research on the rape offender has stressed the psychopathology of the rapist. Many past studies of rapists have utilized prisoners as subjects (MacDonald, 1971); and, within this population, have found support for the view that an individual rapes because of his maladjustment or psychopathology (Golner, 1972).

Most rapes, however, are committed by individuals who do not come to be labeled as "criminals" (Greer, 1975) because rape is both an under-reported and under-prosecuted crime. It has been reported that as few as 1 in 3 to 1 in 10 rapes which occur (Curtis, Note 1) are reported to police and in some areas the conviction rate for rape is as low as .1%. Obviously, then, many men who rape never become part of a prison population. Research strategies which attempt to develop a data base on the rapist who is never apprehended or convicted are necessary to the development of a more complete picture of the crime of rape. Some research has been done utilizing these populations. An early study by Kirpatrick and Kanin (1957) found relatively high levels of sexual aggression among university males. Subsequent studies by Kanin (1957, 1965, 1975) indicated that high sexually aggressive males exhibited significantly more general aggression than non-assaultive males.

The present study conceptualizes sexual aggression as a continuum, and attempted to ellucidate some of the characteristics

and attitudes of males at various points along the sexual aggression continuum.

Special attention was focussed on how these characteristics related to the psychopathology and social control models of rape. The psychopathology model (Sykes & Matza, 1957) stresses the effect of the offender's maladjustment on his inappropriate sexual behavior, while the social control model (Albin, 1977; Weis & Borges, 1973) emphasizes the effect of socialization on rape. Two studies were conducted: Study I consisted of interviewing high and moderate sexually aggressive males, and administering a sexual communication device. Study II was an attempt to expand on Study I. In this study, after interviewing high and moderate sexually aggressive males, a variety of attitudinal measures were administered. Additionally, a control group consisting of nonaggressive men were also given attitudinal measures. It should be noted that the results presented here constitute results from pilot studies and are being presented in an effort to stimulate further research, rather than as definitive conclusions.

Method

Subjects. Twenty-five male undergraduates selected from a group of 462, comprised the two groups of subjects in Study I - 14 high and 11 moderate in sexual aggression. Twenty-nine male undergraduates were selcted to represent three groups - five high,

12 moderate and 12 low in sexual aggression, for Study II.

Procedure. A Sexual Experiences Survey, requesting the subject to read descriptions of ten behaviors of varying degrees of sexual aggression and indicate behaviors in which they have engaged, was administered to large groups of men to identify those who had been highly sexually aggressive (used force or threat of force to obtain sexual intercouse), moderately sexually aggressive (threatened to or did use force but for some reason sexual intercourse did not occur), and who had not been sexually aggressive (no inappropriate sexual behavior reported). Subjects were then given an individual standardized interview, which was conducted by a trained male graduate student in clinical psychology. The sexual experience data were reviewed as a reliability check on the survey and additional data concerning the sexually aggressive incident were gathered. Of particular interest among the topics included in the interview were the subject's emotional reactions to the sexual experience, and his perception of the females' emotional reaction (sexual experience and interview data from 26 undergraduate female rape victims were made available to allow comparisons of males' and females' reactions to similar incidents of sexual aggression). Subjects also filled out a Sexual Communication Survey designed to assess their interpretations of 11 ambiguous female behaviors in terms of their likelihood of being indicative of a woman's desire for intercourse, as well as their ratings of how offended a female

would be in 19 situations of varying male sexual forcefulness.

Differences between Study I and Study II included the addition of the low sexual aggression group and three new assessment inventories. Following the interview, subjects in the Study II completed a 74 item Attitude Survey comprised of the 20 item FEM Scale (Smith, Ferree, & Miller, 1975), and questions tapping sexual values, sexual attitudes, and rape sterotypes. They were also given the Kleinmuntz Adjustment Inventory (Kleinmuntz, 1961), a general measure of adjustment normalized on college students; and the Activity Preference Questionnaire (Lykken, Tellegin, & Katzenmeyer, Note 2), which provides measures of two type of anxiety: physical and social.

Results

Interview data indicated that high sexually aggressive males reported less guilt ($p < .05$), less responsibility for what happened ($p < .06$), and more righteousness ($p < .07$), yet saw their victims as displaying a greater degree of unhappiness ($p < .05$) than the other males. This picture was paralleled in Study II, when high sexually aggressive males perceived more fear ($p < .07$) and helplessness ($p < .04$) in their victims than did moderates, but felt greater pride ($p < .10$) and righteousness ($p < .13$) and less digust toward themselves ($p < .15$). Additional findings in Study II indicated that the high sexually aggressive group felt that their inappropriate sexual behavior had

a significant positive effect on their attitudes toward sexuality ($p<.06$), compared to moderates. High males also reported greater exposure to physical violence when growing up, in terms of being spanked ($p<.06$), being hit ($p<.01$), and observing physical violence between their parents ($p<.03$), than did moderates.

Part I of the Sexual Communication Survey indicated no differences between highs and moderates in both studies; however, differences between the high group versus the control group, were observed in Study II. Specifically, highs were more certain that a female desired intercourse if she breathed heavily ($p<.13$), gave the male suggestive looks ($p<.06$), paid special attention to the male ($p<.01$), or fondled the male's gential area ($p<.05$), than were controls. Part II of the Sexual Communication Survey produced somewhat paralled results in Studies I and II. In Study I, high sexually aggressive males assumed that women would be less offended by five separate sexual behaviors, such as "male forces female's legs apart with his hands" ($p<.05$) and "male removes female's underpants without her consent" ($p<.06$), than did moderates. In Study II, highs were differentiated from other males in feeling that a woman would feel less offended if he forced her legs apart with his hands ($p<.05$). Highs and moderates felt that a female would be less offended if he forced his way into her house after an evening together ($p<.08$), or placed his hand on her covered crotch when she asked him not to ($p<.05$), than did controls. Moderates felt that a female would be less offended than controls subjects

did on two additional items - either holding hands ($p<.03$) or kissing her against her wishes ($p<.06$).

Of the 74 attitude questions, which were collected only in Study II, 13 (18%) were significant at the .05 level, while 26 (35%) were significant at the .10 level. We are currently in the process of developing a factor analytic based scoring system for this survey; however, if one inspects those significant attitude statements, they seem to fall into four categories: feminism, attitudes toward women, sterotypic attitudes about rape, and attitudes which help rationalize sexual aggression. The consistent trends that emerged were that both highs and moderates agreed more with non-feminist statements, statements depicting women as sly, manipulating and unpredictable, and statements rationalizing sexual aggression, than did controls. Additionally, moderates viewed rape in a more sterotypic manner than controls.

The final data collected consisted of a measure of physical and social anxiety, and a measure of adjustment. Although the overall F-tests only approached significance ($p<.14$ for social anxiety; $p<.12$ for maladjustment), tendencies were found indicating that high sexually aggressive males were less physically anxious than controls ($p<.01$), and moderates tended to be less adjusted than controls ($p<.05$). Highs did not differ from controls on the adjustment measure.

Quite a lot of data have been presented. The obvious question now, is: "What do these data suggest?" In looking at the overall picture, a somewhat consistent view of the sexually aggressive male seems to emerge. The high sexually aggressive male does not seem to view his behavior in a negative way - in fact he reports greater feelings of pride and righteousness for what he did, than do moderately aggressive males. Additionally, as indicated in Study II, the highly aggressive males reported that their experience had a positive effect on their attitudes toward sexuality, suggesting again that they view their experience somewhat positively.

Much of the other data collected seem to support the hypothesis that the high sexually aggressive male may rationalize his experience in a manner which allows him to continue in that activity. Sexual communication data suggest that the high sexually aggressive male is more likely than controls to believe that certain ambiguous behaviors on the part of a woman indicate a desire for sexual intercourse, and tend to believe a woman will be less offended by certain inappropriate sexual behaviors. Differences on attitudinal measures were consistent in suggesting an individual who is less feminist, has a more negative view of woman, and holds more beliefs which tend to rationalize sexual aggression, than do controls.

The findings observed seem to provide more support for a

social control view of sexual aggression as opposed to a psychopathology view. High sexually aggressive males did not differ from controls on an adjustment measure and in fact were found to be less physically anxious. Many findings suggested the existence of attitudinal and value differences which might help support or rationalize sexual aggression. This conclusion must be stated as tentative, as the present studies really represent beginning efforts to explore this area - certainly more research is needed.

These findings are seen as having implications for the clinician interested in working with sexually aggressive males. It seems that this type of male is probably unlikely to seek treatment on his own, as he does not seem to view it as particularly maladptive. Upon coming into contact with the unapprehended person, an avenue of treatment that might be profitable would relate to the attitudinal component. It is conjectured that if one could alter the sexually aggressive male's views of sex and women, this might tend to decrease his tendency to continue to behave in a sexually aggressive manner. This is an important area to explore further.

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